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Charles L. Van No

The Mecklenburg
Declaration of Independence
Written in 1800

Charles L. Van Hoppes

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The Mecklenburg Declaration of
Independence Written
in 1800

THE TWENTY-SEVEN SIGNERS
FORGED IN 1892

This Question in Politics

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BROWN-MORRISON CO., LYNCHBURG, VA

Since the proposed placing of the Memorial Tablet in the Capitol Rotunda at Raleigh has gotten very much in politics, I want to make a few plain remarks and expose a situation that every truth-loving person should protest against.

The ignorance, the forgery, and the imposition are all so rank that it makes a chapter of mighty interesting reading.

The Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence of May 20, 1775, was written in 1800, and the twenty-seven signers were forged in 1892.

In a previous circular I quoted a long list of prominent historians and scholars who support the statement that May 20 is a Myth. Therefore, the proposed Tablet should read as follows:

In Commemoration of
The Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence
May 20, 1775
(written in 1800)
And the Twenty-seven Signers
(forged by Savin in 1892)

Erected by
The North Carolina Society of Colonial Dames
1912

A brief outline of the whole situation may be interesting.

On May 31, 1775, the people of Mecklenburg met and passed 20 Resolves, known as the Resolves of May 31. These Resolves are a wonderfully comprehensive document, patriotic and statesmanlike, and were generally known at that period as the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, and they are worthy of all reverence and tributes of praise.

They are signed by Ephraim Brevard as secretary for the committee. All contemporaneous evidence proves them and no scholar has ever disputed their genuineness.

In 1800, John McKnitt Alexander's house was destroyed by fire, and with it the records of that meeting, 25 years before. He thereupon tried to recall from memory that early affair and wrote five Resolves. He fixed the date as May 20, 1775, and called them the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. However, he left a note appended to the statement, saying in substance that the foregoing may not be absolutely correct, but is substantially so, as the records of said meeting were destroyed by fire with my house in April, 1800. This certificate was first published by Dr. Charles Phillips in 1853, and no one has ever questioned or denied its accuracy.

After John McKnitt Alexander's death in 1817, his statement, but without the certificate, was found among his papers, and in 1819, the survivors of that early meeting were called on to testify about that early affair. Their evidence was unanimous as to the meeting, but they differed as to the exact date, and they also recalled additional details not mentioned by Alexander. However, in the absence of any adverse proof the Alexander narrative was accepted as accurate. The Legislature recognized it and it passed into the history and literature of the State as the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence of May 20, 1775.

But about 1847 there was found a copy of a Charleston, S. C., paper published June 13, 1775, containing the Mecklenburg Resolves of May 31—20 in number—and since then an overwhelming mass of contempora-

neous evidence, such as newspapers, letters, and documents, has been found, all of which emphasize the Resolves of May 31, but are uniformly silent about anything happening on May 20. Another noteworthy feature is that all the differing details testified to by the survivors in 1819 and later, are found verified in the Resolve of May 31. Therefore, all the independent scholars and writers on this subject have come to the conclusion that John McKnitt Alexander unintentionally erred in saying May 20, but he really meant May 31, as all evidence points to but one occurrence and his own notes show clearly that he was trying to reproduce the details of the events of May 31.

Now as to the Twenty-seven Signers. Twenty years ago this coming May 20, Charlotte held a great celebration, David Bennett Hill, then governor of New York, being the orator. There happened to be at that time in Charlotte an assistant clerk of the court by name of Savin from somewhere in the North, who had found this employment because of his expert penmanship. He was not slow to realize on the opportunity here presented to transmit patriotism into cash. He therefore forged the handwriting of John McKnitt Alexander on a crumpled and creased sheet of paper, compiled the autographs of 23 "signers," either by cutting them from deeds, wills and other records of 1775, or by using the list published by Lossing in 1851; then tore from the right-hand corner of the sheet a piece to indicate the absence of about 4 signatures, and we have the genesis of the "Twenty-seven Signers." Savin called this rank forgery a facsimile reproduction of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence of May 20, 1775, and claimed that the original had been discovered in the tearing down of an old building!

He then had this document photographed, a plate made and copies printed therefrom. These he sold extensively at fifty cents apiece, and they may be seen framed to-day in many homes in Charlotte and elsewhere.

Now the State of North Carolina is asked to honor the placing of a Tablet to such a rank fraud and forgery because it has behind it the sanction of the North Carolina Society of Colonial Dames, and permission for placing it in the Rotunda of the Capitol has been granted by the Council of State and by the Historical Commission!

Is the State of North Carolina so lacking in moral fibre that she will sit calmly by and let this fraud be perpetrated under the name of patriotism? I recently asserted in a circular that the Society of Colonial Dames were ignorant as to these facts, otherwise I felt sure that they would never have consented to the placing of this Tablet.

I said that they were imposed upon by some folks in Charlotte who should have known better but who are so prejudiced that they refuse to read the evidence.

I have often wondered why the manhood and womanhood of Charlotte did not assert itself and find out what they are worshipping. Who set up this image of gold with feet of clay?

If Charlotte wants May 20 as a day to celebrate and advertise herself, why let her have that day or April fool's day or any other day, but the great State of North Carolina should refuse to longer reverence that day as a historical date when every well-informed person on North Carolina history knows that that date is an *Error*.

But now most of the State Council and the Historical Commission say it is still a mooted question. Such a silly answer shows that most of those gentlemen are simply playing politics and are lacking in back-bone.

There are none so blind as those who refuse to see.

What avails it if every independent writer and scholar who has written on this question in the past fifty years has said with one unanimous voice that May 20 is a Myth, when those who are in the seats of the mighty refuse to read and hear anything save that which they believe to be their own political or social salvation!

Governor Kitchin is brave enough to attack Senator Simmons' party regularity but seems lacking in courage to defend the State's historical integrity and then puts up the plea that it is still a mooted question!

It seems to me that extreme party regularity in our National Councils is a very poor platform for any one to champion. We need fewer party devotees and more statesmen who are intellectual enough to see the Nation's needs and brave and wise enough to try and enforce them.

The Hon. J. Bryan Grimes, a constant champion of North Carolina's greatness and historical glory, finds it just impossible to take a stand for great historical truth because he is seeking his fourth term as Secretary of State!

Mr. Benjamin Lacy has been in office now for eighteen consecutive years, and not satisfied with such a gorging of office holding, is seeking to add another term to his already much too long office tenure, yet he too, no doubt, voted in the mooted question column. It does seem that with some, at least, public office has become a private snap and none others need apply. I say it without hesitation that any prominent politician in North Carolina who professes such ignorance over this much-written-about subject as to say it is still a mooted question is unworthy of his political position and should be relegated back to the school-room. This talk of its being still a mooted question is merely a ruse to hide one's ignorance or prejudice or a lack of courage to tell the truth for fear of losing a few votes.

That the State has adopted May 20 as a State holiday and put that date on the Flag and on the Seal is excusable when we realize that those errors were made before the State was in possession of the overwhelming mass of evidence that she has to-day and which has been told over and over again by scores of writers and teachers of our history. But because errors have been committed in the past is no reason why they should be continued, especially by those whose sworn duty it is to protect and defend the history and the glory of the State.

Since the matter has been under discussion, I have been much gratified and surprised at the many letters I have received supporting my contention. They are coming to me daily from the mountains to the sea and from men and women alike, including Preachers, Teachers, Judges, Lawyers, and others. Only two letters have been received disapproving my course - both from Charlotte. One of them stating that my sole reason was actuated by envy. This party evidently was ignorant of the fact that I married a great-great-granddaughter of John McKnitt Alexander, and, therefore, for the sake of our four children would have every reason to support the May 20 theories did I not revere truth and believe that the Resolves of May 31 are more glorious. Furthermore, if I have not the right to speak out plainly I would like to know who has when it is realized that I have spent thousands of dollars in an endeavor to give to North Carolina a series of histories that are worthy of the State's glorious past and the admiration of all those who are capable of appreciating well and accurately written and splendidly published volumes.

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